

# *Essay*

*December 2007*



## *The Promises of Recovery*

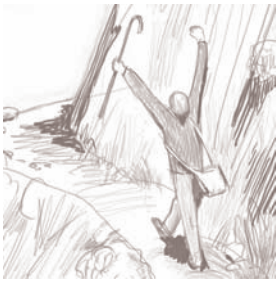
*A quarterly publication of Sexaholics Anonymous*

# The Twelve Steps of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. We admitted that we were powerless over lust—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to sexaholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## *Essay is the quarterly publication of Sexaholics Anonymous*

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**Sexaholics Anonymous**

is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober. There are no dues or fees for SA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. SA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sexually sober and help others to achieve sexual sobriety.

*—Adapted with permission from the AA Grapevine Inc.*

*Sexaholics Anonymous is a recovery program based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous and received permission from AA to use its Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions in 1979.*

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**Newcomers:** Contact SA by telephone toll-free at 866-424-8777; outside North America call 615-370-6062; email at [saico@sa.org](mailto:saico@sa.org); or SA website at [www.sa.org](http://www.sa.org).

## The Promises of Recovery

Six years ago, when I was 21, I was shocked to hear my counselor say he thought I was a sex addict. I was in college and trying to be cool and impress my friends. The last thing I wanted to be was a sex addict. But today I realize that his diagnosis was the turning point in my life.

During my childhood, my dad was verbally abusive to my brother, my mom, and me. My mom had an affair, which basically ended my parents' marriage. I was four and my brother was eight when my mom told us they were getting divorced. I remember that my brother cried, but I went across the room and started playing with toys, as if nothing had happened. It was a pattern that would repeat throughout my life: feeling numb and not knowing how to respond.

Dad's verbal abuse continued



throughout my childhood. On weekends he'd come into our rooms, run his finger across the furniture, and if he found dust he'd say, "You might want to think about cleaning your room." I'd know what was coming; it was like storm clouds gathering. I'd start picking stuff up, but my dad would cuss and yell, "You guys are slob, you need to pick this place up." I'd feel paralyzed, not knowing how to react. I tried burying the pain with video games or by staying busy, or by sleeping over at friends' houses—anything to escape the pain.

When I was eight, my mom married the guy she had an affair with. Dad had several

girlfriends who slept over. He also left pornographic magazines where I could easily find them. My stepdad and older brother also collected pornographic magazines. So the three men in my life were all engaging in various forms of sexual behavior,

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which no doubt planted the seeds of addiction in my mind.

When I was 13, I discovered masturbation. It was both terrifying and exhilarating. I felt fear, confusion, and guilt—but also freedom; a momentary release from the fear and chaos in my family. I thought, “If only for 5 minutes, this is a way out of the pain in life.” When I was 14 and a freshman in high school, I had my first serious girlfriend. By the time I was 15, I had lost my virginity.

In high school, I couldn’t break into the popular crowd of students, and I felt very apart from others. For relief I turned to pornography or my girlfriend. I would sneak my brother’s magazines and act out several times a day. Sex and lust became an obsession.

Often during class I’d feel anxious, like everything I was burying would start to build up, and I’d raise my hand to go to the bathroom so I could act out. I needed this drug to calm down. But when I came back to class, I felt disconnected, like I was outside the world looking in. This only added to my feelings of isolation and fear. I tried acting out in class through my clothes. I acted out on the bus coming home from basketball practice. I masturbated every night to get to sleep. I became paranoid of getting caught and actually *was* caught once by my mom. But the thought of stopping didn’t occur to

me. Instead, I vowed to become more secretive.

After high school I enrolled in a college across the country. Before leaving home, I had to binge one more time with my girlfriend. I spent a whole weekend acting out with her before moving away. I was terrified to leave home, but the feelings were buried. Just like when my parents got divorced or when my dad would yell at us. Buried emotions with nothing to do except numb them.

During college, I’d fly my girlfriend out for weekend binges. I’d get a hotel room and a car. I went into debt. I spent thousands of dollars on this addiction because I felt that I needed to impress my girlfriend (and women in general) in order to feel right about myself.

During my freshman year in college, I joined a Christian organization on campus and decided to reform my life. I thought, “I have religion now, I want to be different.” I decided I was done with sex, pornography, and acting out. But I would stop for only a few days and then act out to pornography again. Or I’d see my girlfriend over the summer and we’d have sex. I realized I couldn’t control my lust; the more I tried, the worse it got. I’d be studying in the library or swimming in the pool, and I’d have to go act out. I was desperate to stop.

Finally, during my senior year in college, I disclosed my struggles to a

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mentor. I said, “Every girl I’m with, I can’t control my sexual behavior. Pornography is a constant obsession. I’m acting out all the time.” He recommended I see a counselor.

I went to a counselor, and before long the counselor said “I think you’re a sex addict.” This floored me—but it was like the first time I acted out: frightening and liberating at the same time. The words “sex addict” explained a lot of my behavior. I felt some hope that if there was a diagnosis, then there might be a solution as well. Although *I really* didn’t want to be a sex addict.

I joined a counseling group for men who struggle with sex addiction. We met once a week and worked the Steps. I was in that group for 13 months. I hated going, but I went every week. Progress came slowly, but the burden of lust began to lift.

I had a major breakthrough with Step One, when I finally realized I could not fight my addiction on my own. I had tried many times but nothing had worked. I imagined stepping into a ring with a 250-lb. 6’5” fighter, who was beckoning me to fight. That’s what lust is like to me, a fighter beckoning me to fight. I would step into the ring and be defeated every time. I finally realized I needed to stop fighting. My Step One breakthrough was this: If I know I’m going to lose, why am I fighting? Today, my image is: “God, I can’t

fight this addiction, You can. I’m stepping out, I need you to step in or I’ll lose.” There’s freedom in that.

I worked through the Steps with my group and found short-term sobriety several times. The counselor recommended I attend SA meetings in addition to group therapy. I went to my first SA meeting in October 2002 but hated being there. I hated saying “I’m a sexaholic.” I felt deep shame. I reluctantly got a sponsor but never called him. In 2003, I “graduated” from the group therapy and was on my own to pursue SA recovery. But inside I was thinking, “I’m on my own to leave the program now.”

I was still acting out but less often and less intensely. Around that time I met a girl, fell in love, and got engaged. Two months before we were to be married, we eloped to Las Vegas, largely because I was sick of trying to not have sex. I was only half-heartedly working my program. I was on my second sponsor and supposedly working the Steps, but I was dragging my feet. Deep down I didn’t really want to be in SA. I thought, “If I’m married this thing will be easier to control.”

But not seriously working the program caught up with me. I noticed I was becoming more emotional and more out of control. Seven months after I left the program, I woke up thinking I had acted out in my sleep. “Well I’m still sober,” I



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thought, “it was in my sleep so I’m not going to count that.”

Around that time an SA friend asked me: “Will your program—the one you’re working now—keep you sober for the long term, or is it just barely keeping you sober now?” I thought, “You jerk, why ask that?” But the answer was obvious: “No, it won’t keep me sober for the long haul; it’s barely keeping me sober now.” It made me think, “What will I be doing in five years if I’m not in the program? Visiting prostitutes or massage parlors?” The thought began to grow in me.

In January 2005, I woke up realizing I had acted out again in my sleep. I knew something had to change. So I went back to SA, fearing I would be rejected, that people would say, “You’re an idiot; look what you’ve done.” Instead, I was embraced. I decided this would be a clean slate; I would get a new sponsor and really work the SA program. I was done with my way of recovery. *Alcoholics Anonymous* (58) says, “Half measures availed us nothing.” I had been doing half measures for three years, and the result was pretty much nothing.



My new sponsor told me to call him every day for 30 days and start working the Steps. Since then I’ve called him almost daily for two and a half years, because it really helps. I worked through all Twelve Steps and started sponsoring others. I attended meetings and got involved in service. And slowly, I began to experience freedom. Today, I’ve been sober for 18 months.

The Twelve Promises of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (83) have been a guiding light in my recovery. The promises motivate me, keep me on the right path, and remind me of why I’m here. After 18 months of sobriety, they’re already coming true in my life. Here are a few examples:

*1. If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through.* Today I’m amazed that I have 18 months of sobriety. Amazed at the friendships I’ve found, and that there are so many people

I finally relate to. I have a home in SA, a place where I finally feel understood. I’m also amazed at the healing I’ve found in relationships with my family, my wife, and myself. And amazed at the spirituality. I became a Christian and went to church but never found what I was looking for spiritually until I came to SA. I think what’s missing from church is what

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we have in SA: real honesty, fellowship, depth, and the ability to deal with our shame.

2. *We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.* Today I have some freedom from lust. The shame and guilt of acting out are lifting. I no longer need to act out to fall asleep. I'm also taking better care of myself. When I returned to SA, my sponsor told me to shave every day and to take a shower before a meeting if I played basketball before the meeting. Those things didn't come naturally to me before, but today, taking care of myself is part of the freedom and happiness of recovery. Recovery is not just about sobriety, it's about a new way of living.

3. *We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.* I have a good relationship with my dad now. We talk regularly. He knows I'm in SA, and that I'll go to a meeting when I'm home. The past is more the past now. I don't fear it or the people I run into from my past. The more amends I make, the less guilt I feel over the past. The past becomes closed when the wrongs aren't hanging over my head.

4. *We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace.* I still feel fearful at times, but my life has become more peaceful in the last five years, so I have hope for a more peaceful life. Also, I see members who have much more peace than I do, and that gives me hope.

5. *No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how*

*our experience can benefit others.*

I sponsor guys in this program and mentor guys at the church. Amazingly, these people are helped by my experience. It seems that the most broken parts of my life are the parts that help and inspire others the most; the parts I was most ashamed of seem to bring others the most freedom.

6. *That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.* I understand feeling useless. I never thought I would have a job I was good at or that I would like. I never felt there was a place for me in the world. But today I like my job and I don't feel useless, so self-pity has less power in my life.

7. *We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.* My wife likes to share things and I don't. I was eating lunch with her recently, and she asked if I wanted to share two things she selected from the menu. I said "sure let's do that." I didn't feel angry or frustrated. I was free to just share lunch with my wife. Little things like that are big parts of this program.

8. *Self-seeking will slip away.* One thing I've had to deal with was a deep underlying desire to be famous. Whether I was famous in ministry or some other area, I thought being famous would cure me. Through SA, my self-seeking is slowly becoming, "God, wherever you want me; help me just to do what you want."

9. *Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.* At my lowest point, suicidal thoughts came frequently. My new outlook on life



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is that I have a purpose and I know things will get increasingly better. I have the hope of a better life.

10. *Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.* Before, I was terrified of my bosses, but today I'm able to be honest and open with people in authority. My boss once told me he trusts me more because of my honesty, and this led to a raise! Also, I understand other people's pain and suffering more because of dealing with my own addiction. I feel more comfortable with myself, which makes it easier to be comfortable relating with others.

11. *We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.* I don't panic as much under stress, problems don't overwhelm me as much, and I know there are people who can help me.

12. *We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.* That part of my program I see every day—in my marriage, at work, everywhere. Things happen that I tried to *make* happen before. I tried to make sobriety happen, make friendships happen, make love happen—tried to make so many things happen in my own power. This program has taught me that God is the one who makes things happen.

I've heard it said that when I die, God won't ask me why I wasn't more like Moses or Buddha or Mother Teresa or Billy Graham. What



God will ask me is “Why weren't you the *you* I created you to be?”

I've been thinking about that lately. I know I'm a sexaholic. I can't change that. When I get to heaven, I don't want God to ask me, “Why didn't you own and accept that you were a sexaholic? If you had, you could have recovered, and you could have helped so many people.” The time to accept my sexaholism is now. The more I accept it, the more I work my program, and the more I work my program, the more I experience its benefits. The most important thing is that I accept who I am. I have to accept that this is a part of my life. It's always going to be a part of my life, and when I work the program, every day—work the Steps, work with my sponsor, sponsor others—then I see the benefits of recovery, every day.

I know that I can recover, and that you can recover—and that all of us can really embrace what God has waiting for us.

—Anonymous

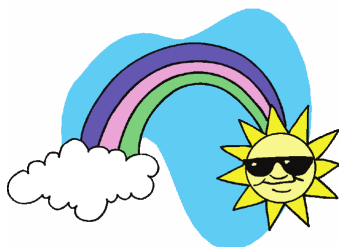
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## A Rainbow of Recovery

I love this quote: “In between black and white thinking is not grey; in between black and white thinking is where the colors are.” I want to share with you the rainbow that recovery has given me.

When I was 17, I got promiscuous. I was acting out a lot. I met a man and fell in lust, and we had two babies. We were abusive to each other physically, emotionally, and mentally. I remember once I had our baby in my hands and he was hitting me, and I thrust the baby into his hands so I could hit *him*. I remember going into the emergency room to get glass cut out of my leg. It was insane. But I could not imagine giving up the physical aspect of my relationship with this man. Finally, five years later, I was able to leave him.

Then I discovered the Internet, and my disease went wildly out of control. At first I did cyber sex. Two years later I was acting out every day, up to 10 times a day. I couldn't stop. I was meeting men I didn't know in hotel rooms. I was having phone sex. I was sending pictures of myself all over the Internet. I had lust in my head all the time. I could not even look at my kids without pornography images in my head. It was like a veil between us. One guy said I seemed possessed, and that is how I felt.



I reached out to five professionals asking for help. None of them had a clue what was wrong with me. Then, in September 1999, I read a book that said sexual addiction is a progressive disease that can be fatal. Finally, something made sense. I called SA the same day asking for help. A lady called back; she used the words “sexual sobriety.” I asked her what that was and she said, “No sex with yourself or with anyone else, except your spouse.” I can't masturbate?? Was she kidding? I didn't want anything to do with it. But I saw how crazy I was. I was in a lot of pain and had been contemplating suicide.

So I decided to go to an SA retreat. I had never heard of the Twelve Steps before. I'm from a very small town in Idaho, and the retreat was in the big city of Seattle. It intimidated me to go there. I made arrangements to meet a woman in Spokane and ride with her to Seattle. I had no idea what a sexaholic was supposed to look like. When I arrived, I was greeted by a short, old, religious lady (I kid her about this today). I got into her car and we drove all the way to the Seattle area for a weekend-long

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retreat. I think we were both a little uncomfortable.

The retreat shocked me. People there were talking about their feelings and this life-long disease. I had expected a seminar of facts and information. I was ready to figure this out. And I had no concept of God or His part in recovery. On the way home, my driver was praying fervently, “I hope she doesn’t ask me to sponsor her.” But I did ask her to sponsor me! She worked with me through the Twelve Steps the first year. I slipped a couple of times. It took me six months to get sober. But the slips were valuable lessons in my recovery.

A lot of great things have happened to me in recovery. At thirty I met my dad for the first time. That was a really big deal. I got baptized. I learned that I have a mental illness: I’m bipolar. I learned how to recognize the symptoms of trouble, how to do a lot of work with my illness, and how to deal with and adjust the medication. That was a big deal. Today I’m stable for the most part.

I’ve continued attending retreats in the Northwest region twice a year. The retreats are amazing. I love hearing the couples share. I get so much hope



from the couples. I love hearing the S-Anons share. I love their being a part of it; although I thought, “S-Anon doesn’t really apply to me.”

But as I arrived home from the San Diego convention in January 2004, my mom informed me that she was having an affair with my ex, the father of my children. I live on my mom’s property, in a separate house, so it was happening right in front of my face, and our two kids were being dragged through this. My mom’s opinion was, “I’m doing nothing wrong. You’re not with him anymore. Why should you care?” So I got catapulted into S-Anon.

I used to drive to Spokane (almost 2 hours away) at least three times a month to go to meetings. When I started going to S-Anon, I wondered, “Oh my gosh, which meeting do I go to, SA or S-Anon? Will they feel uncomfortable with me, since they know I sit in SA meetings with their spouses?” That must have been hard for us all, but I had to take care of myself, and I think there was growth there for everyone.

At the July 2007 convention in Maryland, I participated in a breakout meeting with the topic “Adult Children of Sexaholics.” I felt a deep sense of belonging in that meeting. I hope to see this travel through the fellowship.

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My mom's relationship with my ex lasted about six months. Two weeks after that relationship ended, my ex married someone else. A short time later he called to tell me that he could never be sorry enough for what he had done to me. I was amazed that he could see that.

Today, after being in SA for awhile, one thing I've experienced is the tremendous blessing of service. I've often heard, "The measure you give is the measure you get back," but I've found instead that the measure I give, God multiplies it and gives me back much more.

A small amount of service can bear amazing fruit. For example, there once was a man who lived in Spokane, who started an SA meeting. That man and some other people held a business meeting, and they decided to have a phone line. They developed a script for the phone line, and someone had to serve as Treasurer to collect money and pay for the phone line. That's the phone line I called that connected me to the fellowship that gave me my life. A lot of small links worked together for the phone line to be ready for me.

Then someone in Seattle or Portland decided to have a retreat. For the retreat to take place, they needed planning committees as well as people willing to serve. A lot of work goes into retreats. People just attending business meetings help make

retreats happen, because the committees need enough people to participate in decision making.

Also, because Spokane is far away and the meetings are small, I'm not sure I would have gone there for meetings if I hadn't attended the big weekend retreat and found so much hope. I'm not sure I would have seen the miracle and stuck around. Many pieces worked together to get me into a meeting. That's all the fruit of service. In doing even a small service, we can be saving someone's life. So I've become a service junkie.

Someone asked if I would chair the Loners Committee, because I'm a loner geographically. I thought, "No, I'm doing too much!" But God kept niggling at my heart, and I thought, "What if there was a network that women could plug into? Where they could get sponsors and connect with each other—sort of an entryway into the fellowship?" That's how WiSA (Women in SA) was born. We have a weekly phone meeting, and more than five countries are represented. We also have an email group. Women from ten different countries are members of that group. That's pretty amazing—the ability of all those women to connect with other women. And now it's becoming independent from me, which is great. It was a lot of work, but well worth it. I just did what God asked me to do. That's what I'm doing when I do

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service, and I get back so much that I cannot stop doing it.

Being a woman in this program can be a challenge. I once heard a man describe his discomfort about being triggered by a woman in his meeting. I wanted to jump on the table and shout, "Try being in a room full of women and you are the only man!" I'm a gutsy sort of person, but for women who aren't, walking into a room full of sexaholic men can be intimidating. But I've found that it is in these meetings that we learn to relate to the opposite sex in healthy ways.

Today, as a single woman who desires SA sobriety, I know I cannot have sex with myself or with anyone else. But because of SA, I'm able to have healthy relationships with men today and to experience progressive victory over lust. I'm not cured, but I've stepped away from lust.

My sobriety date is March 12th, 2000. Because I haven't acted out for a while, I recognize lust sooner when I feel it. It's like poison. I can almost feel it in my veins if I fanta-

size; it's toxic. I'm grateful that I can recognize that now. But I don't think sexuality is bad; God made us sexual beings. It's my disease that turns sexuality into lust and perverts it into what it isn't. Today I believe that if I have a sexual thought or feeling, or if I'm attracted to someone, it doesn't mean I'm bad or that I shouldn't have felt those feelings. That's the way God made me. If I can say, "Oh, that's just a sexual feeling" and surrender it and not do anything with it, then it goes away. That, for me, is progressive victory over lust.

I'm more intimate with God when I allow myself to feel. I don't recommend this type of thinking for newcomers because stepping away from lust for awhile is a key to freedom. But I believe that God has healthy sexuality in my future, I'm just waiting and not taking any active steps. That gives me hope. It doesn't have to happen today.

I've been attracted to a guy who works at a store where I shop. I think it might be mutual. I was able to

### **Women in SA (WiSA)**



WiSA unites women in fellowship and recovery, helping women to ease into the predominantly male fellowship. We want every woman to find help, support, and encouragement. We offer phone meetings and email support. For more information, call 1-888-802-5376 (toll free), email [womeninsa@yahoo.com](mailto:womeninsa@yahoo.com) or visit our website at [www.womeninsa.org](http://www.womeninsa.org).

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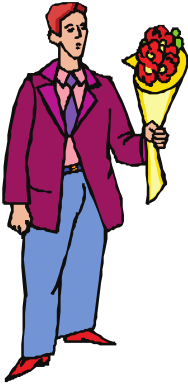
experience being attracted to him, and I got a little flustered, which hasn't happened in years, because I've stepped away from relating to men in this way. So I left the store feeling kind of giddy. But I didn't fantasize about him or do anything else with the feeling except keep it in the

context of what it was. I'm not going to marry him. It is what it is. To me, that is progressive victory over lust, one day at a time.

I love this fellowship and I love all of you.

—*Judy C.*

## Young and Sober in SA



I'm an 18-year-old virgin sexaholic. I came to SA in March 2006, worried I wouldn't be accepted because I've never had actual sex. But

at my first meeting I was assured that I was quite qualified.

My sexual behavior started with masturbation. My sexuality began with romantic fantasies; that's really the key to my acting out. When I started attending public school in the 5th grade, I was already addicted to the idea of girls and relationships. I met my first girlfriend in the 5th grade, and I would email her. Once I ended an email with "love you" and felt rotten as soon as I sent it. Our relationship didn't warrant that emotion, but I felt compelled to write it. In the next 12 minutes, I logged on 13 times to see if she had replied.

In those days, we got charged a flat rate each time we logged onto the Internet, and when my mom got the bill she asked me why I hadn't just logged on and stayed on. But I couldn't because I would check, then feel bad for checking, then log off. Then I just had to check again. That sort of behavior stuck with me.

I had strings of girlfriends and masturbated the whole time. I fantasized constantly about the girls at school. But I got labeled by the girls in my school as a prude, because I wanted to be sexual and romantic but didn't have any idea how to do it.

When I was in 7th grade, one of my friends was getting sexual with a girl who wasn't even his girlfriend. I wished I could do that. I had a girlfriend, but all I could do was hold her hand. One night when I was leaving her house, I felt it was time to kiss her. It would have been our first kiss. So I leaned over to kiss her, but I missed and got her on the cheek instead. That was the epitome of my



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inability to be sexual. She dumped me for missing our first kiss, and I got labeled as a prude who couldn't even hit the lips. I made a silent vow that I would not be a prude anymore, but I couldn't change. That's who I was. Sex, I couldn't do it.

That year I started drinking and doing drugs. It seemed to help; I felt cool when I was drunk. I would steal alcohol for people, including for my brother and myself. I got good at drinking and smoking pot and doing pills and other stuff. I could finally go to school and be a tough, cool kid. I'd always been sort of the geeky smart kid who was trying to be cool. But now I felt cool being drunk and stoned. I also felt that sex and anything to do with girls and romance would be easier this way.

My drinking and sexual behavior became interwoven as time went on. In the 8th grade, sex was very much in my mind but on the back burner because drinking had a more direct effect. I'd go to school drunk, get drunk after school, and get drunk at night. I progressed rapidly in my alcoholism; I was surprised how fast. As it progressed my craziness and not caring about people also progressed. I

went from being a pretty good kid, loving my parents, and doing what my mom told me—to very quickly being out of control.

I started getting into trouble with my drinking. I'd go to school drunk for days in a row. As I drank and masturbated, I became a different person. I was a jerk. I was mean to people at school. Once I picked a fight with a kid in school for no reason and punched him in the face. I'm not violent; it was just stupid. I ran from school because I didn't want to get caught drunk.

The worst part of it was my mom. My brother was in deeper than I was with drugs and alcohol. My parents had just decided to send him to a \$40,000 rehab. They didn't have the money for this, but they took it out of their retirement. I didn't think it was a big deal that my brother was leaving. I just thought, "Darn, I can't drink with my brother anymore."

I was in the principal's office and my mom came in. I had been the good kid up until then, but when she found out I was drunk she broke down and cried. I didn't care. Today, I can't imagine a mom going through that, but I felt no emotion as I

***Reminder: When submitting your story . . .***

*remember to tell us what you were like before, how you found SA, what works for you, and how your life is different today. Include contact info, and indicate whether you would like to remain anonymous in print.*

**Submit stories to [Essay@sa.org](mailto:Essay@sa.org)**

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watched her bawl. I was saying, “Mom, stop crying, it’s not that big a deal.” I was insane. But at that moment I also realized I had a problem.

So after five or six months of messing around with pot and other drugs, I ended up in an outpatient treatment center. My goal was to be the best outpatient person there, and my behavior did get a little better. I graduated from that program and started going to church with my parents, and I found some goodness there and some help.

About 7 months later, my brother came back from rehab, where he’d been for a year. In less than two weeks, he went to a party and I decided I wanted to smoke pot again. I thought of all the reasons that it wasn’t against the Bible to smoke pot. I don’t know why I thought I had to do that . . . but I ended up going partying with my brother that night.

I would drink a lot of cough syrup that contained a drug, and take various pills. When I was drunk, I would go to the the grocery store and steal erotica books, and sit in my car and drink and act out. Deep down, I knew I had no reason to do this. I have great parents and a great family. My dad and mom worked hard



to give me a good life. I felt bad. I thought, “I should be a good kid, but I’m just a screw-up. I shouldn’t do this.” But I couldn’t stop; I was masturbating daily.

I never looked at much Internet porn because my mom was good at blocking it. It was easier to go to the store and get magazines. Masturbation and fantasy became huge and compulsive. Eventually I would just get the thought to masturbate and I would have to go do it.

All this time I was involved in my church. I looked innocent; I played on the worship team. One of my more shameful memories is the time I got drunk before church, and then my sister and I played a special song for the offering, and I was playing drunk. I remember thinking, “There’s something wrong here; just yesterday I was thinking of making my own translation of the Psalms.” I had been thinking that if I got more connected with the Psalms I would get healed. I had a lot of compulsive religiosity behavior.

My continual masturbation had a bad effect on me. After acting out, for the rest of the day I could not connect. I’d get irritated at stupid things. I’d blow up at my parents or my siblings. It started progressing. I

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remember when voyeurism started. I worked at a coffee house and had a lot of voyeuristic thoughts about the customers. Lots of romantic fantasy, like, "That girl really wants to marry me." I could tell. But the shame got worse every time I masturbated. I knew I shouldn't be doing this. Why wasn't my faith helping?

One night I had a gay sex dream. I thought I was the only guy who'd ever had a dream like that. I worked with a gay guy, and I was starting to think about acting out with him or asking him about gay things. That was painful because I knew I wasn't gay, but I suddenly wanted to be gay. That dream was the next step for me.

I made plans to go on a missions trip with my youth pastor and some other guys to help out at a church up in Canada. Four days before the trip I stole a bunch of cough syrup and pills. I had a ziplock bag full of pills, and I was doing those and drinking before the trip. The day of the trip my mom found a red pill on the floor of my room. She knew what it was because she'd caught me before. I had been lying to myself, "I'm not really doing this, I'm fine." And then, suddenly it was over. Instantly. I started bawling. My mom is great and we talked. I called the youth pastor and confessed, and he came over. I ended up going on the trip.

I knew all of this insanity was related to my sexual acting out. I could

not stay sober in AA and could not stay sober from drugs if I was acting out. I had known masturbation was wrong for me for a long time. Once, way back when I was in the outpatient treatment center, my counselor had mentioned just in passing that in Seattle they have SA meetings. I always remembered it. And I always thought, "Maybe I need this Twelve-Step-for-Sex thing."

So I looked up SA online and read the 20 questions. I related with most of them. But I thought, "I don't know; I've never had sex!" I was in complete denial. I called the number on the website and left a message. Then I came to SA. I felt a great sense of relief after my first meeting. What I'd been seeking in church and my own strivings was what I found there. I felt peace. I heard members tell their stories, and I shared some of my story. I was glad when I realized "They seem to think I'm a sexaholic! So I can come back!"

I started attending that meeting but the next few months were difficult. My sponsor said, "It gets worse before it gets better." It did get a lot worse, because now every time I acted out I felt worse than before. I started having lust for my dog. I started having lust for my sister. One time I acted out and felt like I needed a hug, but I didn't want anyone to touch me. So I laid down in my parents bed with my little brother and

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read him a book and was trying to connect. But I couldn't lay next to him because I was lusting after him. The thought that I was lusting after my brother just about killed me. This was really getting bad.

In July 2006, I went on a vacation with my family up the coast. I was sober for three days before we left. My sponsor had given me a plan for the vacation, but I didn't follow any of it. I acted out every day. I ruined the vacation. I should have been having the time of my life. My parents paid for awesome dinners, I got free coffee every morning, we stayed at a place right by the beach—and every morning I was killing myself with acting out. Then I would resent my parents for stupid reasons.

On the beach I'd pretend I was sunbathing, but I'd be acting out in my head. I didn't want to do it. I tried calling my sponsor, but the call didn't go through. I was on the Internet trying to hook up with an old fantasy partner. Then I'd think, "I can't be doing this," and I'd leave and go sit out in the living room with everyone

else. Then I'd go do it again.

When I got back from vacation, I started participating in daily renewal phone meetings, and I started getting better. The meetings are timed for the east coast, so it was 4:30 or 5:30 a.m. my time. But I participated in those meetings every day

The last day I acted out was the last day of my vacation, July 8, 2006. My sobriety date is July 9, 2006. I started calling my sponsor and actually being honest. I started calling when I felt like acting out, and I would feel better. And I thought, "I should try that again, that worked!" It was simple. I felt like crap; I called my sponsor; I felt better. I'll do that again. It works.

Then I started working the Steps. When I shared my Step One I felt like a new person; like the shame was gone. It was huge for me. I've also done a lot of work with my romance and relationship addiction. That's what fuels my acting out, that need for a person to fulfill me. I'm not good enough by myself; I need someone to do it for me. Now, I talk

### **SA Daily Sobriety Renewal Phone Meetings**

*Unable to attend your regular face-to-face meeting?*

Can't leave your house because of sickness, bad weather, car won't start? Difficult to get to a meeting when you're traveling? Now you can make a meeting every day! Attend a live SA teleconference meeting with others in the U.S. and other countries who are seeking sobriety. Find meeting schedules and more info at <http://www.denversa.org/Misc/phnflyer.pdf>



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to my sponsor when I'm attracted to girls at school. I go to college, and I'm attracted to a lot of girls. But I can talk to my sponsor and that helps.

I recently started taking salsa lessons at my church.

I asked my sponsor about this and he said, "Maybe it's an individual thing. I don't know how many sexaholics are going to take salsa lessons." A woman from Peru teaches the class; it's real salsa and I love it. Taking these lessons is a way for me to step out. I think some of us sexaholics tend to think, "I'm sober, I'm going to avoid everything that could take this away from me." But I've found that the more I go out and do things that are hard—with wisdom and honesty and checking in—the more I have to work my program. I have to surrender in the moment and bring things into the light. There's always something to bring into the light.

The salsa lessons have also been good because I'm timid by nature, but when dancing I have to lead the girl, initiate the spins, and decide where we're going on the floor. I have to put myself out there. I've had to learn a new, healthier way of relating to women rather than just lusting.

I'm young, and one reason I'm



grateful to be young is that I haven't wrecked marriages or wrecked kids. Marriage and family are still ahead of me. If I want that I can have it. That's a gift. I'm thankful that God led me to SA, where I could find the help I needed.

God has also allowed me to continue being involved in music. I write music now. That's also something I've worked on with my romance addiction. I've written songs accessing the part of my heart that's scarred, but that can love people and eventually will love a woman in a real way.

My gratitude list today is mostly about people. The thing I used to fear the most—other people knowing me—is what I cherish the most today. When I see my mom I can say, "My mom is awesome!" and believe it. I don't have to pretend to not be resentful. I can go home and love my mom and dad despite their character flaws. Every one of us has character flaws, but I have grace for people today because SA had grace for me. They said, "For a young guy, you're pretty screwed up too; we'll let you in." I want to show that grace to others.

Today, I'm most thankful for my sobriety. Also, I'm pretty sure I'm one of the youngest people in this fellowship, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to share my story.

—Anonymous

## **Recovery from Lust**

In 1998, I believed I had a good life. I was 50 years old and satisfied in my marriage of 25 years, secure in my job, and content to have raised two grown children who were now out of the house. At the time, computers were the latest technology, and the Internet was an intriguing way to spend time talking with people from all over the country. But soon chatting wasn't enough. I started experimenting with cybersex chatrooms and flirting with all sorts of people. I spent most of my spare time sneaking onto the computer to find someone and have cybersex. So how did I suddenly become afflicted with sexaholism?

The truth is that I did not suddenly "catch" this addiction, as one catches a flu virus. Character defects that had plagued me since childhood were part of the cause. All my life I had covered up my low self-esteem with self-righteousness. I thought I had all the answers. I didn't need friends or people to depend on. I went to Temple and said the prayers but didn't really need God. He was there for the weaker people. I had my life under control; I knew what was best for me. My wife thought of me as



withdrawn and solitary.

The computer was like a bright hypnotizing light; I was the firefly drawn into its deadly charms. Lustful fantasies helped me forget my fears and worries. I could

feel passion and excitement without leaving home. I rationalized it wasn't really adultery because I had no intention of ever meeting any of these strangers. I remember one weekend when my wife was out of town. I could hardly wait to get home from work to spend some time on the Internet. I was hoping a certain woman would be online because we always got quite sexual. Many hours later I was insane with thoughts that I could actually be in love with her. Did I really believe all those things she had said to me? I was so confused. I had lost all perspective. Was this Internet relationship real or pretend?

By the fall of 2001, I was fairly adept at balancing my secret life. I had opened additional email accounts, was calling women on the phone, and finally did the one thing I vowed never to do—I met them offline. I was staying after work for hours at a time, had stopped communicating with my wife, and was losing sleep at



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night wondering what kind of person I had become.

One day at the office I was online chatting provocatively when my wife signed on to our account from home and knocked me offline. She then intercepted the instant message from a woman—and I was busted! My wife was furious and laid down the law: we would get counseling, and I would stop chatting and meeting with other women or she would leave. I was remorseful and apologetic and vowed to do whatever it took to save my marriage. We went to counseling, but my life-long character defects were never brought up. My problem was diagnosed as mostly a mid-life crisis. My marriage returned to its normal routine.

In early 2002, my wife decided to have surgery to help improve her quality of life. I remember leaving her hospital room for the night, and on my way home stopping at a strip club. I was soon back on the Internet, visiting chat rooms and looking at pornography. In late spring I traveled to Las Vegas with some male friends. I made an excuse the first night to go off by myself, and met up with a woman I chatted with on the Internet, who lived in Las Vegas.

At night I would be anxious and

worried that my wife would catch me again. I had trouble sleeping. I tried to comprehend why I was destroying my life with this behavior, but I could never figure it out. In 2003, my wife was working with me as my office manager. We disagreed over various policies. She felt frustrated and ineffective, and decided to take some time off. Before long, the office was in disarray. I couldn't figure out why I was working so hard but had nothing to show for it. One of my employees was stealing. I resented my wife for leaving but denied this; I didn't want to share with her my concern that I could not handle things on my own. Instead I started chatting on the Internet with one of my wife's friends as an outlet.

My wife's friend was dissatisfied with her marriage, and emotional feelings developed between us. Soon



we were meeting in my office, and even going to parks to have sex. The affair lasted almost two years—while my wife saw this friend at least once a week. They were in the same social groups and would go shopping and have lunches together.

I knew I was doing a horrible thing. I tried many times to stop but eventually we would be back at it. In August 2005, at a local park,

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a policeman caught us in the midst of a sex act. I was utterly embarrassed. I pleaded with him not to let our families know. Sitting in the police car I felt my life was over. The policeman must have felt some compassion because after an intense lecture he let us go with no charges. As scared as I was over this, within a few days my wife's friend and I were making jokes about it.

Thanksgiving 2005 began in a normal way for me. After a morning run, I helped my wife get things ready for the turkey dinner with our family, including our two grandkids. I would sneak upstairs every hour or so to check my emails. Lust was always in my thoughts. Physically, I spent the day with my family, but mentally I was miles away in my sexual fantasies. Ironically, when my wife was interested in having sex later on, it was the last thing I wanted to do. Without the lust, my gas tank was on empty. My wife thought I must be tired. I turned over to sleep but my mind was wide awake. I felt alone and scared, like a lost child in a dark, forbidden forest.

I was losing my wife, but even more I was losing myself. There seemed to be no way out of this horrible place. I felt trapped. I couldn't believe the things I was doing. I did not want to live another day in this affair. I was tired of lying, sneaking around, and betraying my wife.

I decided that the only way I could stop would be to confess. Whatever the outcome, it would be better than another day of lying and cheating. Suddenly I began to cry. My wife was startled from her sleep and asked what was wrong. With a power from somewhere deep within myself, I blurted out what I had been doing over the last two years. It was as if I turned to God and said I will now do whatever it takes to stop this insanity. When the smoke cleared over the next few days, we were sleeping in separate bedrooms, and my wife was talking of divorce. My wife wanted nothing to do with keeping this a secret. She told many of her close friends, as well as our son and daughter. She also confronted her so-called friend. I was devastated, filled with shame and guilt.

Promises and apologies were not going to work this time. I had to do something to find out why my life was self-destructing. So again I went to counseling. This time I was given a copy of *Sexaholics Anonymous*; this book was amazing. I read and reread sections to understand the concepts more fully. I instantly recognized my behaviors as being addictive. The idea of powerlessness over lust finally explained why I could not stop.

In January 2006, I attended my first SA meeting. It didn't take long to find understanding and comradeship in this group. I went to several

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meetings a week and made calls when I needed to. I asked someone to be my sponsor. As we worked through the Twelve Steps, the guilt and shame began to lift. Listening to the stories of other sexaholics, I realized I was not alone, and that even with my character defects, I had a chance to make positive changes. I could have a better life than I had before. Now *that* is a miracle!

I've become a sponsor to several members, and I realize how important these relationships are to my health. I can use the errors of my life to help others. "No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 84)—one of the grand promises of this program. All the stories I hear prove to me that my addiction is like a disease in remission, but it could become active if I don't care for myself. The SA program must be a priority in my life.



The program is working for me as long as I keep working the program. I'm learning to trust that my Higher Power will always be around to protect me, and that not everything I want is what I need. There will always be obstacles in my life, but the way around them is to be vigilant about working on myself. My marriage is on much firmer ground, but it will take a lot of work to make amends to my wife. I feel blessed to say that in January of 2008 my wife and I will celebrate our 35th wedding anniversary.

Coming upon two years of sobriety, I will never forget that I was willing to destroy everything in my life for this lust connection. Now, with the grace of God, I have a chance with the SA program to make things right. This enriches me and gives me all the strength I need to live one day at a time.

—Dave L., *Cincinnati*

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## Old Time Recovery Sayings

1. It's not old behavior if you're still doing it.
2. If you're looking to have an image in SA, look around at the meetings you go to and take a look at whom you're trying to impress.
3. This is a 'One Day at a Time' program. If you are clean and sober today, you are tied for first place in SA.



## Only in God Is My Soul at Rest



I was 18 when I first went to a gay bar. I had to wear a wristband to get in. I stood in the corner on the edge of the dance floor nursing my virgin Rum and Coke. My hair was unkempt. I wasn't manicured. Every time I tried to connect, all I could say was, "God this music sucks." I was desperate to make friends, but I couldn't seem to break through.

I would gravitate to confident people because I utterly lacked confidence. I wanted desperately to be wanted. But I would suck all the oxygen out of a room as I tried to sell myself to some other person who I *really* liked (lusted after). If a guy liked me (if he was weak enough to like me) that meant he was a tasteless loser and not worthy of my time. I didn't know then that I was motivated by a poor self-image, but I see it clearly now. I would only accept perfection (fantasy). I wanted my "grown-up love life" dream to come true. I assumed that everyone was identical to me.

I was living for fantasy. I hadn't a clue. Love was a mystery I had only just begun to pursue. I was sure that "real love" must involve sex (lust). How could this rush not be inherently good? My selfishness was not ap-

parent to me. I saw myself as loving and good.

Today, 15 years after that first visit to the gay bar, I have learned from SA that in those encounters I was really trying to connect with my Higher Power. I was seeking God's love; the sexual encounters were missed connections. Still, I thought I wanted sex. I called it "gay monogamy" or "I'll give you everything and love you and you give me everything and love me." This sexual/emotional "everything" that I had placed my hope in turned out to be frail, impotent, and fleeting. I was never satisfied. I kept on acting out, hoping that my fantasy would just somehow kick in. I kept hoping that "Act out, Despair, Repeat" would yield different results. The results were undeniable. This descending course of obsessive sex was killing me.

For me, that very first year of teenage bar hopping was like pouring oil on the downward addictive slope. By the time I was 19, I was disillusioned, and I started casually glancing at religion for answers. I had spent four nights a week at the bars during the first teenage endeavor to satisfy my lust, and for what? Mom

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and dad were terrified. My older sister insisted, "Something's not right!" I started with nothing and now had less. I was losing my self-respect. I was losing myself.

As the years passed, I would turn only occasionally to bars for comfort and companionship. Instead, I was seducing others into my addiction. At home, I was leaning heavily on a lifestyle filled with pornography, masturbation, alcohol, and isolation. I tried to use all of these inherently mutilating weapons as tools to manage my crisis that I called Life. This life was always unmanageable. Through the ensuing years of trial and error, I crossed boundary after boundary. I was now doing the things I would never even have considered. I would turn to God again and again with no intention of actually surrendering. Unsuccessfully, I tried to juggle my desire, shame, and faith. I really wanted God (love) and my addiction (lust) to be compatible. They never were. I sought advice. Everyone had different expectations, opinions, and suggestions.

Mom said, "Go to school." Dad asked, "What are you going to do with your life?" Friends said, "You just need to find a nice man and settle down." Distinguishing the difference between what I needed and what I wanted eluded me. I thought I could see clearly but I could not. I was deliberately keeping God separated

from the part of me that so desperately needed Him. Where my lust was concerned, God was not welcome. Amazingly, through everything, God never lost faith in me. I could hear God calling, but I was not ready to surrender my addiction just yet.

As I sought the missing components I so obviously lacked, I began to think and pray. First I thought, "I need to be straight." *Translation:* "I want to please everyone and be a good boy." After half-heartedly trying to be straight (sober) and finding I couldn't change, I thought, "Okay, I'll just be celibate." *Translation:* "I am in control and I can manage this." But instead of celibacy, I got a regular sex partner (brilliant!). Next, I thought, "Okay, so we're not committed. Well, at least I'm not serious (invested). I mean, we both know this is all bullshit so it's okay." *Translation:* "I am desperate, clueless, and lonely." Finally came, "Okay, I know porn is bad but now I'm celibate (technically?)." *Translation:* "I can't live without this porn or lust. I can't let go. I will NOT let go."

I didn't, couldn't, wouldn't see that I was powerless. Time was passing. My appetite grew. My heart grew calloused. God wanted surrender. I knew this. I just couldn't commit to who exactly was going to relieve my sexaholism. Was it going to be God or me? I persisted in masturbation, pornography, and lust. God allowed my

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obsession to lead me to my bottom; I came very near to the boundary I would not cross.

I began to be severely triggered by young teenage boys. I finally felt terror. There was something more tangible than morality at stake and that was me. I was going to die. God could not forgive me if I did this horrible thing because my heart truly knew better. I had to run for my life. The belief in God that I held so tenuously was about to change. It had to change. As I sat soaked in tears, I surrendered. There was nothing left to wait for and no more reason to hold back. I had life, love, sanity, and freedom to gain from shedding my isolating obsession. I went to God directly. Well actually, I went to confession. The priest suggested SA. *WHAT?!?!!* But I went, and I stayed.

I came to SA bringing my devout Catholicism, so my definition of healthy sexuality was identical to the sobriety definition in *Sexaholics Anonymous* (192), including the asterisk regarding marriage between a man and a woman. When I read *Sexaholics Anonymous* it was as if someone had cultured my soul in a Petri dish and given me back an insightful, detailed analysis. Like most, I was a wreck at my first meeting. My incli-

nation in the first few meetings was to just dump. “Okay, you’re really here for me? You’re *really* with me? Okay, take it! I don’t want it anymore!” But this didn’t work. I wanted to be rid of me (just the bad, of course); I wanted total recovery, immediately. “I’ve earned it,” I thought. Hmm. Patience, waiting, taking steps, making calls—damn this is hard!

Then I was shown that The Problem is actually me (SA 203). I was also shown that The Solution is God and others (SA 204). “Encouraged to continue, I turned more and more away from my isolating obsession with sex and self and turned to God and others.” I’m encouraged. Now at meetings, I try not to dump and run. I don’t need to share everything at the meeting; it’s not appropriate. But I do share everything somewhere (Hello sponsor!). Recently I celebrated six months of sobriety.

Today, I know I’ve found my everything through the fellowship of SA. Not until writing this did it come full circle. It’s God. God is my Everything. He is my pure and perfect provider. I find Him in my prayers, my sponsor, my church group, my family, and in the fellowship of SA. He even shows up in complete strangers to whom I never speak. God truly

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### **Call for Articles !!!**

We are seeking stories from members who struggle with same-sex attraction and who have found recovery in SA. *Submit to [essay@sa.org](mailto:essay@sa.org)*



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is my all-loving Father. YES!!! That's it!!! There He is; my Everything, my perfect companion. I can give Him everything: my faults, my hate, my resentment—even my pungent lust. Wow. As my surrender continues and deepens each day, I see that God never runs out or runs dry. To my surprise, God clearly manifests this miracle of recovery daily—if I'm looking for Him. It blows me away that God is working in me through my faults every day. Through my SA group I hear Him saying, "Keep

## Showing We Care

Recently I met with a newcomer who was inquiring about SA. He had identified five different fellowships dealing with sexual addiction. He wasn't quite sure where he belonged. He wanted a fellowship that would support his involvement in a same-sex relationship.

I shared that I deal with same-sex lust and had been involved in same-sex relationships prior to coming to SA. Those relationships had stopped working for me, but I was unable to change my behavior. I shared that I need a fellowship like SA that rules out same-sex behavior, and that there are other members like me in SA.

Seeing that he was not interested in SA's approach to same-sex lust, I explained which of the other fellowships would meet his needs. He

coming back! It works, if you work it, so work it 'cause you're worth it!!" Am I listening to Him? Well now, this is the battle for all of us every day, right?

And finally, God says to me, "Hey Greg, here's your homework, just for today: Be sober, listen softly, take the actions of love . . . oh, and Greg . . . call your sponsor!"

—*God bless, Greg B.*



found the maze of program acronyms confusing, so I even wrote down the name of the other S fellowship for him. It seemed important not to argue the point or try to sell him on SA.

I recalled some things I had read in *Alcoholics Anonymous* (95) about working with others: "do not wear out your welcome," "do not exhibit any passion for crusade or reform," "never talk down," and "offer him friendship and fellowship."

In my early recovery, I heard something that has stuck with me: "Before people care what you know, they need to know that you care." I hope I left this man with accurate information about SA, but more important, with the feeling that he had been treated with care and respect.

—*Anonymous*

## How I Stopped Being a Chronic Slipper



I started sex-addiction recovery in 1994 in another sex-addiction fellowship, and spent the next eight years in a state of chronic relapse. Sometimes I couldn't even get one day of sobriety, although a couple of times I reached six months. But five years ago something changed, and I have been able to stay sober.

I am a high-bottom sexaholic. My behaviors consisted of fantasies, compulsive masturbation, and compulsive use of Internet pornography. I didn't believe that to act out was to die. But even though in recovery I was acting out less, my acting out behaviors were getting progressively worse. In the space of about five years, I progressed from never using Internet pornography to being unable to sit at my home computer without surfing for porn. It didn't matter why I turned on my computer—I would invariably end up looking at porn.

The fantasies and Internet porn focused on violence against women. I knew that as my disease progressed, I would eventually start doing these things in the real world and not just between my ears. But even that knowledge was not enough to compel me to stop. There were times when my addiction scared me enough to get me sober, but that would last only

a few months at best.

Five years ago, I had a breakthrough. Several things happened around that time which led to sobriety.

First, I realized I was not making sobriety my top priority. I have energy/sleep problems, and it was not possible for me to work a full-time job and also do the recovery activities I needed to stay sober. I kept trying to balance the two. I would focus on recovery for awhile at the expense of work, and things would get better. Then I would put my focus back on work at the expense of my recovery activities. Taking the focus off recovery inevitably led to acting out. Things would get worse, so I would re-focus on recovery. And so on, back and forth. Eventually I realized that I cannot stay sober until I make recovery/sobriety my number one priority at all times. In the past when I had problems getting out of bed and going to work, I would use masturbation to get me going. With my new focus, I would stay in bed until I had the energy to face the day. Needless to say, this decision did not make my employers happy. I've discovered that I cannot stay sober and work a full-time job. So I now

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have a part-time job, and I've applied for disability.

Second, I finally understood why I wanted sobriety. I had understood that my acting out was unmanageable. I also understood there was some severe unmanageability in my relationships. But these weren't enough to make me do the difficult work required of sobriety. I finally realized I would never become "happy, joyous, and free" while I was a chronic slipper. I was miserable and unhappy. Even though things would get better at times, I was stuck in being miserable and unhappy. Using my addiction to suppress the pain was not working to get me better. This realization of unmanageability was the final portion of my Step One. This is what, to this day, gives me the overarching desire to stay sober. This is



## Ownership

I recently read a book that describes how our consumer society works. The author suggests that we are manipulated into believing we have personal value by what we own. Our identity is linked to what we possess and by how others judge us through these objects. He makes a great observation: This consumerism is never-ending because trying to find ourselves through things doesn't work. The false identity we

why I want sobriety and recovery.

Third, I learned that sexaholism is a "forgetting" disease. Toward the end of my acting out, if I managed to stay sober for more than a month, I would start to forget how bad it had been. I would reduce my recovery activities, and after two or three months I would act out again. When I got to 90 days the last time, I started sharing in every meeting that I was vulnerable; that in the past, this was about the time I would forget and subsequently relapse. I re-stated why I wanted to be sober: because I was sick and tired of being miserable and unhappy, and I wanted what the program had to offer: being happy, joyous, and free. I did this at every meeting until about the nine-month point, and it worked.

—Chad C., Denver,  
sober for 1,959 days

seek through things is short-lived, so we keep looking for more, keep buying, and keep consuming. We never arrive at a point where we are finally satisfied, where we have enough. The goal posts keep moving.

As I read this, it occurred to me that this is the same lie that my lust always tries to get me to buy. When I become obsessed with a person through my lust, I develop a subtle belief that this other person will make me happy, or as stated in *Sexaholics Anonymous*, make me whole. Yet my

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whole life is a history of how this has never happened. Even when I did develop a relationship with another person (based on lust) one of two things would occur: Either I was driven to become increasingly involved with the person, no matter how inappropriate or dangerous it might become, or I became disillusioned, arriving at a sense of “Is that all there is?” before moving on to another relationship.

But lust has no more power to make me feel complete than the car I drive or the clothes I wear. This is a

hard lesson for me to learn. Accepting this truth will be a life-long process. The SA program of recovery and my union with my Higher Power are the only real answers. My hope is that I am gradually growing in this awareness of my attachments to lust and material possessions. In time I hope to become freer of the potential hold they have over me; to focus instead on growth in the areas of gratitude and humility. I resolve to redirect my focus when I buy into those old lies.

—Anonymous

## Letter to the Editor

Dear brothers and sisters in SA,

I’m writing today to check in with many of you whom I have known in the fellowship over the years. It has been a beautiful and long journey since I first began attending meetings 10 years ago in Detroit, then hit my bottom and got sober in Columbus, OH and continued with SA in the mid-Hudson region of NY. I will never forget all the good friends I made on the way.

The good Lord called me to a radical vocation in life some three years ago, when I entered seminary to study for the priesthood. That too was a total surprise for this agnostic who hated the Church and was highly suspicious of the word “God.” I’m happy to say that my spiritual life is progressing, and I am learning ever so

much more about how to be a sober human being and relate to others. I used to not care so much about others. Actually, I wasn’t much aware that others existed. Now I’m slowly reclaiming years of running away from intimacy and relating to people, and learning just how poor I really am. I’m continuing to face the reality about myself with courage. It can be very humbling to live with many holy men who have lived more and loved more than I can imagine. I believe, however, that with God’s power anything is possible. There is no cap on the spiritual progress available to me. The question is always the same: will I face reality



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and deal with life on life's terms (and thus grow), or will I run away again (perhaps not so much into lust today as to distractions)? The answer for me is clear: I want to become who God made me to be.

Some time ago, I decided to reconnect with SA, and ordered a subscription to *Essay*. I wrote, explaining why I wanted to reconnect:

*"I'm writing to report that I had a lust incident tonight, which caught me totally off guard. By the grace of God, I have preserved my sobriety, but my ego certainly has been shaken. I am not as strong as I thought; it took me a long time even to figure out that what I was doing was lusting. It seemed innocent, as it always does. A waitress in a restaurant with whom I had something in common, a desire to relax and perhaps show off to another friend, and I was ready to give up all for this newly met person. A little joke about "wanting to get her number" from my friend, did not help. My friend is not a sexaholic; I am.*

*I was ready to lose everything in my heart and head to possess something that was in no way mine. Something that is not even "real," as Sexaholics Anonymous says. "We went for the fantasy, for the connec-*

*tion that had the magic." I wanted a little magic without thinking about what I was doing. I guess I didn't count on the years of active addiction which formed these responses in me.*

*I am writing because I realize I need some kind of connection with the fellowship, even if it is just a printed meeting. Perhaps in the future God will want me to be more involved again, and then I will be glad to attend the meetings again. For now, I am working my program the best I know how in my circumstances, and thanking Him everyday for still keeping me sober."*

God has heard my prayer. In a couple of days I am meeting a good SA friend for lunch. I have everything I need in my life to intimately share with others my graces and struggles. Even though it's not through SA meetings today, the question is still the same: Will I be open and rigorously honest with myself in front of others? And as long as I can say yes to that, I keep my connection with my Higher Power and my recovery on the right path. I'm looking forward more and more to what God has in store for me in church ministry and in life.

*Peace and blessings on all of you,  
—Tom W.*



### **Call for Articles !!!**

Please describe what works for you in your program, such as:

- Your experience working the Steps or Traditions, or
- Your thoughts on working with a sponsor or a sponsee

***Please submit articles to [Essay@sa.org](mailto:Essay@sa.org)***



## Announcements

### New Groups

#### Peru

Lima

#### Greece

Trikala

#### USA

Anderson, SC

Champaign, IL

Coeur D'Alene, ID

Dubuque, IA

Flowers Branch, GA

Limerick, ME

New Orleans, LA

Omaha, NE

Prescott, AZ

### Additional Meetings

Buffalo, NY

Corpus Christi, TX

### Wanted: Additional SA Trustees

SA is currently operating with only five Trustees (the minimum allowable under SA Bylaws), which would create a problem if one Trustee needed to discontinue service. It also means more work for the current Trustees.

*Qualifications:* Minimum five years sobriety; knowledge of Steps, Traditions, and Concepts; prior SA service experience; and willingness to serve. See pages 26-27 of *SA Service Manual* for details. Please let us know of qualified members in your Region who are willing to serve. **Submit nominations to [saico@sa.org](mailto:saico@sa.org)**



### Graphic Designer Proficient in InDesign

Graphic artist needed to provide assistance in laying out pages of future issues of

*Essay*. Must have current access to Adobe InDesign software and be able to transfer files electronically.

**If interested, contact [Essay@sa.org](mailto:Essay@sa.org)**

### Member Stories 2007 - Now Available for Sale

This volume contains 35 member stories, including new stories, stories from *Member Stories 1989*, and stories that have appeared in *Essay*. Copies are \$10 each plus shipping & handling. Orders of 20 or more receive 20% discount. Order by phone:

370-243-565, local: 615-370-6062, or toll free:

866-424-8777; by fax: 615-370-0882; or by mailing enclosed order form to: SA Central Office, PO Box 3565 Brentwood, TN. You may pay by credit card,

check, or money order (in US funds, payable to SA).



**Articles for *Essay* should be submitted to [Essay@sa.org](mailto:Essay@sa.org).**

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## A Note from the Delegate



I'm Larry H. from Pittsburgh, PA. I've been elected as Chair of SA's General Delegate Assembly. This fellowship is very important to me and my recovery, as well as to my family. I've been a member of SA for over 19 years. My sobriety date is 9/1/88.

I believe my main task as Delegate Chair is to communicate back and forth between the fellowship and my fellow servants. In addition to talking with members face-to-face (at meetings, marathons, and conventions); through Representatives, Delegates, SAICO, and sa.org; I believe that our *Essay* newsletter is another great way to communicate. We are fortunate as a fellowship to have our current editor and editorial committee, who continue the tradition of preparing this "meeting in print." I recommend that we all take advantage of the sharing assembled in these pages. Part of our Twelfth Step "carrying the message" is doing so within the fellowship. Unfortunately, several members have told me that they didn't know about *Essay*. Please pass the word around about this newsletter and invite others to read these pages.

Feel free to send any questions/comments to me at SAICO.com. And please ask your Higher Power for guidance for all of us.

—Thanks, Larry H.

### Attention Conference Speakers!!!

If you speak at an SA event and would like to submit your recording to *Essay* as a potential member story, we can now receive recordings through email as mp3 files. If you are unsure how this works, we will walk you through the process. *All conference recordings must be accompanied by date, place, and speaker's contact information.* Please note that member stories printed in *Essay* are limited to approximately 2,500 words, which is the average length of a speakers' meeting share. However, the transcript of your recording may be edited due to space limitations.



Contact [essay@sa.org](mailto:essay@sa.org) for more information.

Trustees and Delegates can be reached at [saico@sa.org](mailto:saico@sa.org)



## Calendar of Events



**February 9, 2008**, SA/S-Anon Marathon, Norcross, GA, sponsored by Georgia SA/S-Anon. *The Journey Continues*. Info at sa\_ga\_journey@hotmail.com or Gary D. at 404-271-3533.

**March 7-9, 2008**, SA S-Anon Australia National Conference, sponsored by SA Canberra. Theme: *Overcoming the Obsession*. For info call Jerome at 61 02 6296 3841 or see Saoz2008@yahoo.com.au.

**March 15, 2008**, SA/ S-Anon Marathon, *Come to Believe*. Glen Ellyn, IL For info call SA (630 415-0341)

or S-Anon (630 415-3147); leave message.

**May 23-25, 2008**, Edmonton area SA/S-Anon Spring Retreat. *A Spiritual Awakening*. For info call SA hotline at 780-988-4411, email at essayedmonton@yahoo.ca, or contact webmaster at www.edmontonsa.org.

**May 30-June 1, 2008**. SA Men's retreat, Big Bear, CA. Info at 619-203-7691.

**September 19-21, 2008**, SA/S-Anon Regional Conference. Irvine Marriott, Irvine, CA. Info at recoverystuff@gmail.com.

**Submit events to be listed in Essay to saico@sa.org**

*Submit info to be listed in March 2008 Essay by February 15, 2008.*

*Please submit dates, theme, place, and points of contact. Event flyers are helpful for responding to member questions.*

*Please contact an international operator for guidance on international calls.*

### Upcoming International Conventions



**January 11-13, 2008, Newark, NJ.** *Chorus of Recovery*  
Info at [www.chorusofrecovery.org](http://www.chorusofrecovery.org)  
or 732-886-2142, option 3.

**July 11-13, 2008, Akron, OH.** *Welcome Home*  
Akron, the birthplace of 12 Step Recovery, is the city where Bill W. and Dr. Bob founded Alcoholics Anonymous. *Location:* Radisson Hotel Akron City Centre, Akron. For special convention room rate, contact [www.radisson.com/reservations/](http://www.radisson.com/reservations/) & enter promotional code "WELCOM", or call 330-384-1500 (or 800-333-3333); mention "Welcome

Home" convention. To register, contact [www.welcomehomeakron.com](http://www.welcomehomeakron.com), or mail brochure included with *Essay*. For more info contact 330-315-2008 and leave message, or email [info@welcomehomeakron.com](mailto:info@welcomehomeakron.com).

*Events are listed here solely as a service, not as an endorsement by Essay or SAICO.*

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## The Twelve Traditions of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on SA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for SA membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or SA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers.
6. An SA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the SA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. SA should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers
9. SA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. SA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.

*Essay presents the experience, strength, and hope of SA members. Opinions expressed in Essay are not to be attributed to SA as a whole, nor does publication of any article imply endorsement by SA or by Essay. Manuscripts are invited, although no payment can be made. All articles submitted are assumed intended for publication and are subject to editing. All materials submitted become the property of Essay for copyright purposes. In submitting articles, please remember that SA's sobriety definition is not debated, since it distinguishes SA from other sex addiction fellowships. Essay is not a forum for non-SA sobriety and non-SA principles.*

